

Agents of Mercy
Lesson: Bringing Love to a Hurting World
Grades 4-6 Lesson



Goal:

Our world often is confused by what true mercy looks like. Pope Francis calls us to a culture of encounter, to recognize the dignity in the person in front of us. This encounter leads us to action on their behalf by serving others through works of mercy. Christ has called us to go and make disciples of all nations and in a special way to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead. In so doing, our hearts change and we learn to be merciful as the Heavenly Father is merciful.

Materials:

Bibles
props for skit
access to iPad, smart phone or videocamera for recording

Lesson:

It is important first to define mercy. A good explanation for this age group is: mercy is the ability to choose to do something that will help someone else even when you have the ability to take the easy way out and not make that choice. In other words, mercy is always a free choice to help another. It is never compulsory.

Scripture:

Read the story of the Unmerciful Servant. Matthew 18:21-34

Then, have students watch the light-hearted re-enactment of the story.

Questions for Discussion:

What causes the master to have mercy on the servant?
How does the servant respond to the mercy shown to him?
Why is the master upset with the servant's actions?
What is the proper response when mercy is shown to us? Why?

Discussion:

Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Miserables*, powerfully illustrates grace, mercy, justice, and redemption. At the outset of the French Revolution, the main character, Jean Valjean, has completed an extended prison sentence for stealing bread. When finally released from prison, Valjean's passport marks him as an ex-convict.

Valjean seeks to get a fresh start, but he is spurned and mistreated. Eventually, gracious Bishop Myriel takes him under his roof. After clothing and feeding Valjean, the criminal repays the Bishop's kindness by stealing his valuable silverware. The next day, the local authorities arrest Valjean and bring him to the Bishop for justice.

Bishop Myriel responds with astonishing mercy. Instead of confirming the theft and condemning the thief, he simply tells Valjean that he forgot to take the silver candlesticks as well. The Bishop shoves the expensive candlesticks into Valjean's knapsack. After the authorities leave, Myriel urges Valjean to become an honest man. The criminal receives a gracious opportunity to live for God instead of evil.

Though Valjean deserved death for his crime, Myriel showed mercy and over-the-top generosity. Because of the Bishop's actions, Valjean began an honorable life of generous public service. His experience is a wonderful example of what Christ does for us—extending both mercy (not receiving the punishment that we do deserve) and grace (receiving special favor that we do not deserve).

Activity:

Discuss the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy (see link). Divide the class into groups and assign each group a specific work of mercy. Have the students organize a 30 second skit to represent that work of mercy. Give them 5 minutes of preparation and then have each group perform in front of the class.

For homework, have students review the list of 51 Corporal Works of Mercy ideas. Encourage students to pick one of these to carry out during the week, either alone or in small groups. Ask them to create a short video of what they did and what they learned from the experience.

Pray the prayer below with the students to ask God to help us share mercy.

**Loving God,
Help us to open our hearts to receive your mercy.
As you cast open the doors of Your heart to us,
May we respond by joyfully proclaiming your mercy to others.
Help us to be witnesses of your mercy, living it as Jesus did.
May we never grow tired of being merciful and compassionate to others.
And help us to remember that Your mercy is unending.
We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.**

